Equality of Opportunity and Freedom from Discrimination

MHR Connections

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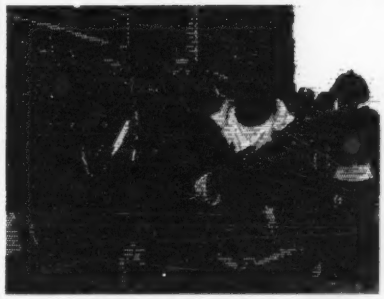
Film Festival gears up



A still shot from the video "Life From 95". According to the filmmakers, it was a great way to channel energy into positive activity.

The first Manitoba Association for Rights and Liberty (MARL) Film Festival begins with a film highlighting the richness of Manitoba's diversity and concludes with "Seeking Refuge", a documentary which follows five asylum seekers and their attempts to be accepted as refugees in Canada.

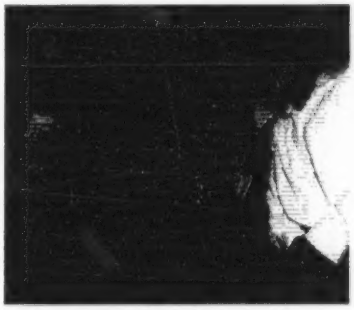
Beginning in Winnipeg, on March 21, 2011 and corresponding with the International Day for the Elimination of Racism, the Human Rights Film Festival will be the first of its kind in Manitoba. Executive Director of MARL Cindy Murdoch encourages everyone to also take part in the panel discussions.

"Discussions and Q & A's allow the audience to learn more about the films, the concepts and the real issues behind the films from the filmmakers themselves," she says.

The films range from documentary the "Grand Rapids" and the short film "Live/Life From 95" to the full length movie "Billy."

"Grand Rapids" is a record of perceptions about how construction of a dam has altered every aspect of the lives of the residents of Grand Rapids, Manitoba.

"Live/Life From 95" is the result of a project through the Winnipeg Arts Council's WITH ART program. Filmmakers Jim Agapita and Ervin Chartrand worked with the youth from the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organizations of Manitoba (IRCOM). Agapita and Chartrand also brought in friends, like the talented Wab Kinew and Dammecia Hall, to help out with the making of a hip hop video. "Live/Life From 95" is about the making of the video.



The many young faces of IRCOM (Photo by Robert Barrow)

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THE MANITOBA HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

LA COMMISSION DES DROITS DE LA PERSONNE DU MANITOBA

www.manitoba.ca/hrc

The Rights Connection
by Yvonne Peters Vice-Chairperson

A recent headline in the Winnipeg Free Press, "Winnipeg waitress fired for shaving head can't get human rights hearing" unfortunately misled the public into believing that the staff of the Manitoba Human Rights Commission refused to take a complaint.

As a result, over the past week the Manitoba Human Rights Commission has been inundated with mail regarding this situation. Most express frustration and anger at the Commission saying that "this is a sad reflection on Manitoba's Human Rights Commission."

The Commission would like to clarify that to date it has not made any "ruling" on this complaint. Those who contact the Commission are told that anyone can file a complaint and they are encouraged to consider whether they may have experienced discrimination based on one or more of the protected grounds in the Human Rights Code. Theses grounds include, but are not limited to, disability, sex, age and ancestry.

Although a situation in which someone shaves their head to support another who is undergoing treatment for cancer may not be strictly viewed as a contravention of human rights legislation, illnesses which cause baldness, or an allegation that the individual is being treated differently because she is a woman, are certainly issues that the Human Rights Commission would take seriously. Even though this approach to the law was not reflected in the headline, the reporter made this point very clear in her article after interviewing the Commission's executive director.

An intriguing headline serves the purpose of enticing the reader to read the article. It can be an art and many are very good at it. But in the wrong hands, it can lead to an uniformed, angry, response. Unfortunately, for some people, and other media outlets here and across the country, the headline becomes the story. Misinformation replaces intrigue. Those media outlets, which decided that the headline was the story and passed it on, without the due diligence of checking the facts, have not done its readers, listeners or viewers any favours. They certainly have not informed people of their basic human rights in Manitoba.

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The drama "Billy" is the story about one man's search for acceptance. It is based on the life of Billy Beal, portrayed in the film by Ernesto Griffith who was one of the 2011 Human Rights Commitment Award winners of Manitoba. Billy will be at the Garrick Cinema on Friday March 25th, with an admission fee of $5.00.

the topics of "Land of Oil and Water" by Warren Cariou and Neil McArthur.

Not only is" Billy" well worth the price of admission, "In the Locker" will also be screened. This 16 minute documentary is the winner of the March 21st Human Rights Film Festival Student Filmmaking Challenge.

Thursday, March 24 features shorts programs and youth workshops. "Land of Oil and Water" is a documentary about people affected by the development of the oils sands. "Warchild" is a short experimental documentary about a young man's state of mind during a solitary portage between the barren wilderness and a desolate city. Also featured is the drama "The Sacred Seven" about a neglectful foster home situation and how one child strives to establish balance. The final screening is the music video "Live from 95" followed by a youth workshop.

Much of the Film Festival is free admission. For more details about dates and times, visit MARL's website for the complete program www.marl.mb.ca/

Rights Advocate leaves a legacy

Abraham (Abe) J. Arnold 1922 - 2011

Abraham (Abe) Arnold C.M., LL.D. will be remembered for his relentless advancement of human and civil rights in Manitoba. Mr. Arnold was one of the founding members and first executive director of the Manitoba Association for Rights and Liberties (MARL). He was a vital part of the association from 1978 – 1990. Mr. Arnold was also a journalist, accomplished author and noted Canadian Jewish Historian. In 2001, Mr. Arnold received an honourary doctorate from the University of Winnipeg, and in 2004 became a member of the Order of Canada.

Settlements

If you believe that you have been discriminated against, you can get help without filing a formal complaint by agreeing to pre-complaint conciliation. This process requires both your participation and the potential respondent's and opens the door to resolving the issue in a quick and efficient way

Once both parties agree, a mediator will telephone the person or organization that you believe has discriminated against you and will explore the possibility of reaching a resolution on an informal basis, without a written complaint.

This quick, informal method of dealing with human rights concerns, often results in agreements similar to what you may have received by filing a formal complaint. The following are examples of recent pre-complaint resolutions.

Meetings become more personal than professional

A young woman said that she had experienced objectionable and unwelcome sexual advances by the owner of the establishment where she worked. She said it began with an offer of a career advancement opportunity and she agreed to meet with the owner outside the workplace on a number of occasions.

The meetings she said became more personal than professional and culminated when he invited her to a meeting in a hotel suite and sexual remarks and touching took place while she tried to remove herself from the situation. She quit her job and informed her boss's wife.

The pre-complaint resolution resulted in the young woman receiving $5,000 for lost wages and counselling costs, and an apology. The owner also agreed to implement a harassment free policy in the workplace.

Changes to a door prevents a formal complaint

The most common ground for a complaint at the Manitoba Human Rights Commission is discrimination based on disability. In this example of a pre compliant resolution, a woman with Multiple Sclerosis made changes to a restaurant that will benefit many people with physical disabilities.

It began, she says, when she had to wait outside the door of the restaurant for another customer to come and open the door for her.

When contacted by a mediator, the owners said that they would install automatic doors, and planned to do so within a few months. The woman was satisfied that the restaurant would have the problem looked after, but said that she would monitor the situation to make sure that the doors were insta[illegible].

How often is pre-complaint resolution used?

This fast track approach to potential complaints is usually offered to those who are considering filing a formal human rights complaint. Over the past five years, pre-complaint resolutions have resolved up to 20% of the complaints filed. Pre-complaints take an average of 30 days. If a resolution is not reached, a formal complaint can then be filed.